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AUTHOR Gooder, Glenn G.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

In accordance with legislative mandate, the Office of the Chancellor for California Community Colleges is seeking to develop principles and policies regarding credit/noncredit courses. This progress report outlines six principles on credit/noncredit determination which include the requirements that: (1) credit/noncredit status be determined by educational professionals; (2) appropriate criteria include academic level of instruction and requirements for assessment of student performance rather than course subject matter or purpose; (3) curriculum be expressed in terms of the college's mission rather than credit or noncredit status; and (4) course funding not be based on credit/noncredit status. Minimum requirements for credit and noncredit courses based upon these principles are presented next, indicating that while credit courses are to provide for official student evaluation and enroll only those who meet certain prerequisites, noncredit courses are to be open to all students who can profit from the experience. Finally, partial responses to seven research questions upon which the credit/noncredit study is based provide information on the educational needs of Californians, the history of college credit/noncredit courses, the patterns of enrollment at the California community colleges, the relationship between credit/noncredit status and funding, and the enforcement of standards. (JP)

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Board of Governors of the
California Community Colleges
December 6-7, 1979

Agenda Item 2

Title: Recommended Principles and Policy For the Determination of Credit and Noncredit Courses

Staff presentation: Dr. Glenn G. Gooder
Interim Chancellor

Allan Petersen, Administrator
Program Evaluation and Approval

Chuck McIntyre, Director
Analytical Studies

Summary

This item is a progress report on the credit/noncredit study which recently enacted law (AB 8) requires the Chancellor's Office to conduct and complete by January 1, 1980.

The item recommends principles and policy regarding determination of credit and noncredit courses. As a result of discussion of this item by the Education Policies Committee of the Board of Governors, the question of what should occur in a course for it to bear college credit has been separated from the question of the purpose for which the course should be used. In addition, credit and noncredit status is separated from funding in the proposed principles and policy.

The item also includes abstracts of information which are being gathered and will be included in the study which will be submitted by the Chancellor to the Legislature.

Recommended Action

It is recommended that the Board adopt the principles and policy for determining credit and noncredit status of courses in the California Community Colleges as described on pages 3 and 4.

It is recommended, further, that the staff be directed to augment and reconvene the Special Advisory Committee on Credit/Noncredit course policy for the purpose of preparing for Board of Governors review and action prior to July 1, 1980, a classification of curriculum and community services and procedures for implementation of the principles listed on page 3 of this item.

Background

Supplemental language in AB 8, the major local agency funding measure for 1979-80 and 1980-81, requires among other things, that:

> 84716. The Chancellor of the California Community Colleges shall conduct a study and recommend policy on the determination of credit and noncredit courses, and submit the report to the Legislature and the California Postsecondary Education Commission on or before January 1, 1980. The California Postsecondary Education Commission shall review the Chancellor's report and make recommendations to the Legislature on or before March 1, 1980.

In October, an information item was presented to the Board of Governors which traced the legal background of the credit/noncredit issue and described an impasse which had been reached in the process of approving new courses submitted by the districts for approval. This impasse was the result of the Chancellor's Office position that because of a change in law (AB 459-Montoya-1977) it could not approve certain courses for credit, even though many similar courses in other colleges were being offered for credit (since they had been added to programs which had been approved prior to the change in legislation). The item traced difficulties which have resulted from attempts to enforce the law as it is understood and described governance implications which have arisen.

It is apparent that determination of credit and noncredit courses is not an issue which can be dealt with simply. It is a matter which concerns the entire curriculum of the community colleges. It is an issue which reaches beyond the curriculum to academic standards and governance, as well as to finance.

As a result of discussion within the staff and consultation with a special advisory committee on credit/noncredit course policy, a design for the study was developed around a series of questions. The questions permit the various interrelated concerns of educational policy, finance and governance to be considered in sequence, if not separately.

Study questions, with abstracts or descriptions of information being compiled in response to each, are provided beginning on page 5 of this item. The study will be completed and forwarded to the Legislature by the Chancellor on or before January 1, 1980.

The Education Policy Committee of the Board of Governors considered this item on November 16, 1979. As a result of those discussions, it was agreed that the question of what a course ought to be to receive credit was separated from the question of the purpose for which the credit would be used. It was also agreed that decisions on funding should not be made on the basis of the credit or noncredit status of a course. With these principles as background, the committee discussed definitions of credit courses which had been advanced by various groups. The Committee directed staff to prepare definitions for credit and noncredit courses which would incorporate the basic elements of the definitions discussed and reflect the principles described above.

Principles and policy were drafted and were referred to the Special Advisory Committee on credit/noncredit course policy on November 20, 1979. The following principles and policy are recommended as a result of this process.

Recommended Principles and Policy for Determining Credit and Noncredit Status of Courses in the California Community Colleges

Principles

1. The determination of "credit" or "noncredit" status of a community college course is an educational matter which should be determined by the professionals in the colleges in accordance with minimum standards established by the Board of Governors and policies adopted by local district governing boards.

2. The "credit" and "noncredit" status of courses should be determined by the academic level and rigor with which the subject matter is treated, requirements for enrollment in the course, and requirements for assessment, accountability, and performance of students enrolled in the course. It should not be determined on the basis of the subject of the course or the course title. The purpose for which a course is used is a significant matter which should be addressed by the field and the staff, with recommendations for action by the Board of Governors prior to July 1, 1980.

3. The curriculum of the community colleges should not be described only as "credit" or "noncredit" but rather in broader terms such as those in the Long-Term Finance Plan of the Board of Governors which refers to the mission of the community colleges as "comprehensive, including general, transfer, occupational, developmental and community education."* (Emphasis added)

4. The "credit" or "noncredit" status of a course should not be the basis for decisions on funding or state support of the course.

5. A classification of programs and courses for funding decisions should be developed and reconciled with prior Board of Governors policy on Long-Term Finance and with provisions of the Gann Initiative. This classification, which may not be equivalent to that in #3, should be based upon a judgement of the extent to which public (versus private) objectives are served by the course.

6. Title 5 regulations should be modified, as required, to implement these principles and the following policy regarding "credit" and "noncredit" courses.

Policy

In the California Community Colleges, courses shall include, as minimum requirements, the following:

A. "Credit" Course

A credit course is a course which, at a minimum:

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*Although not included in this list, it should be noted that Community Services also has been identified as one of the "statewide objectives to be treated in the proposed planning and accountability process."

1. Is approved by the local district governing board in accordance with standards established by the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges as a collegiate course meeting the needs of students eligible for admission, and has been approved by the responsible officials and faculty bodies as being of appropriate rigor.

2. Is taught by a credentialed teacher.

3. Teaches toward a set of instructional goals common to all students enrolled.

4. Provides for measurement of student performance and culminates in a formal recorded grade based on uniform standards which is permanently recorded and is available as an official student evaluation.

5. Grants units of credit based on a prespecified relationship between the number of units and performance criteria.

6. Enrolls only students who meet prerequisites.

7. Is offered as described in an outline and/or curriculum guide in official college files. That outline and/or curriculum guide must specify the scope, goals, content, instructional methodology and methods of evaluation for determining whether or not these goals have been met.

8. Permits repeated enrollment only with prior written approval of college authorities.

B. "Noncredit" Course

A noncredit course is a course, which at a minimum:

1. Is approved by the local district governing board in accordance with standards of the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges as a course meeting the educational needs of students eligible for admission.

2. Treats subject matter and uses resource materials, teaching methods, and standards of attendance and achievement appropriate for students 18 years of age or older.

3. Is taught by a credentialed teacher.

4. Is conducted in accordance with a course outline.

5. Is open for admission to all those 18 years of age or older or are otherwise eligible to attend who can profit from the experience.

Abstracts of Information Being Gathered for AB 8 Credit/Noncredit Study

Question #1: What are the educational needs of California's citizens who are eligible for admission to California community colleges?

This section deals with the educational needs of those California adults who are eligible for admission to community colleges. The question is limited by addressing those needs which can be met by community colleges; that is, those needs within the college "mission".

The community college mission (and its clientele) has evolved significantly during the past three decades as a result of, literally, thousands of programmatic and fiscal decisions by local boards of trustees as well as the result of many major studies and law changes that have taken place at the state and national levels.

Today nearly 1,300,000 students are enrolled in 106 colleges and nearly 3,000 off-campus out-reach locations managed by 70 separately-organized districts. The average-size college now enrolls about 10,000 students on campus. One in every twelve California adults is served in a regular instructional program. An unknown additional number participate in community service programs.

The typical student long ago ceased to be the recent high school graduate attending full-time. Seven of 10 students attend part-time and the average age is twenty-seven. More than one-third of the enrollment consists of individuals over thirty-five years of age. Community colleges have established their own identity as institutions for lifelong learning, separate from the public elementary and secondary school system, and unique among postsecondary institutions for their comprehensive community-based mission.

The composition of enrollments, which changed dramatically during the 1970's, will change further during the 1980's. There will be a continuing shift to older students as the general population itself becomes older and as more adults return to college for retraining and personal enrichment. Associated with this trend is a possible increase in the proportion of part-time students who now comprise seven of ten college enrollments.

Within this framework of enrollment trends and institutional responsibilities, it is possible to examine the needs and preferences of California adults for community college education. This examination should provide new insight as to the need and priority for noncredit, as well as credit, instruction.

Preferences of those currently enrolled are dramatically different from what they were one or two decades ago. During the 1950's, a much larger proportion of community college students expressed a "transfer objective" (though about the same number as now, less than half, actually did transfer). Virtually all of the remaining students were enrolled in a vocational objective. Few sought what might be termed as developmental or community education.

Results of a recently completed survey of California adults suggest that the emphasis on academic transfer in the 1950's may have given way, during the 1960's, to increased attendance at community colleges for reasons of "personal enrichment or improvement." Another survey of recently enrolled community college students suggests that the current emphasis has switched yet again, this time toward occupational training.

Aside from the major trends in preferences, there is evidence that certain needs of students, defined by their capabilities at enrollment, have become increasingly significant during the past two decades. The needs of college students, as well as nonstudents, for upgrading in basic communication and computational skills is clear, and in some cases, startling. Most dramatic are the students who enter the community college with significant learning and study skill problems that impede their progress toward their educational and career goals.

Examination of data from diagnostic tests in a half-dozen California Community Colleges illustrates the magnitude of the problem. Results vary dramatically depending upon the test used, group tested, locale, and other characteristics of the college and its clientele. Even so, it appears that in most colleges, a majority of entering students are in need of additional instruction in basic communication skills in order to perform successfully at the postsecondary level.

National studies confirm that the problem is not confined to California. Several national studies report dramatic increases during the past decade in both the number of programs and students enrolled in remedial or developmental instruction in community colleges across the country.

Question #2: What is the history of college credit and noncredit classes?

Response to this question will include selected historical and legal elements from the October Board agenda item on the credit/noncredit issue.

Brief reference is expected to be made to the more long-range evolution of the community colleges from junior colleges which provided lower division college academic preparatory programs to comprehensive community colleges which serve people in vocational education, developmental education, community education and community services as well as in baccalaureate preparatory education.

Question #3: What has been the pattern of enrollments in California's community colleges?

This section reviews specific patterns of enrollment that have characterized California Community College growth during the past two decades.

Except for 1978-79, recent trends have been toward an increasingly older and more part-time group of community college students who spend an increasing proportion of their instructional contact time in noncredit classes. The traditional perception of student enrollment patterns no longer holds. Formerly, community college programs were thought to enroll two distinct student types:

(a) the recent high school graduate who carried a full-time load during the day and did not work to any significant extent, and

(b) the older, employed individual who enrolled at night in one or two classes on a part-time basis.

While may individuals still enroll under one or the other of these two patterns, it is clear that most individuals do not take programs conforming to the neat dichotomy of (a) day, graded, full-time, non-adult as opposed to (b) evening, ungraded, part-time, adult. Increasing numbers attend both day and evening working full or part-time and taking both credit and noncredit courses. Midway through the past decade, there was a significant rise in numbers of older students attending graded courses on a part-time basis during the day. This likely was due to high employment rates, the general economic situation, and federal policies regarding the draft and veterans benefits. The most rapidly increasing component of college enrollments has been the female between the ages of 25 and 29 years old. Many of these students are undergoing training for entry or reentry into the labor market. Women over twenty-five comprise the largest single group of students attending only non-credit classes.

About 90 percent of all noncredit course activity statewide occurs in just ten districts. At the other extreme, fifteen districts did not offer any noncredit instruction during 1978-79.

Just over half of all noncredit courses are taught during the day statewide, and six of ten are offered at off-campus locations. By contrast, seven of ten credit courses are offered during the day and only one in ten off-campus. Noncredit course sections tend to be larger and are more often taught by the lecture technique than are credit course sections.

A great deal of policy debate has centered around certain noncredit course offerings dealing with personal enrichment, crafts, recreation, and the like. Statewide, the number and proportion of ADA in these courses is small, comprising less than 2 percent of total activity. However, many individuals are enrolled and most activity is concentrated in just a few districts. Consequently, a proper policy solution needs careful deliberation and very explicit definition.

Question #4: What criteria and standards are applied to credit and noncredit courses in the community colleges and in other segments of education?

Reference will be made to the handbook entitled Programs and Course Approval Procedures in California Community Colleges, which was distributed widely in April of 1977.

A comparison will be provided of the criteria and standards of noncredit courses eligible for state support and those of community service courses. A comparison will be provided of the criteria and standards of noncredit courses eligible for state support and those of credit courses. Legal differences between credit and noncredit courses will be identified. The kinds of courses which the State has funded will be described. Problems of equity in the delivery of these courses will be noted.

Preliminary analysis of this kind of information indicates that the labels "credit" and "noncredit" should be applied to elements within a broader program classification. They should not serve as the two main elements of program classification. Preliminary analysis suggests, also, that the terms "credit" and "noncredit" do not provide an adequate guide for funding.

Question #5: What criteria and standards should be applied to courses for college credit and to those for noncredit?

Having reviewed criteria and standards which have been and are applied, reference will be made to other or possible additional criteria. Among those to be considered are the level of student performance required and the manner in which that performance is evaluated; academic standards applied in the course; and the manner in which the subject matter is treated.

Review and discussion of criteria and standards up to this point suggest strongly that determination of credit and noncredit status and criteria and standards are academic and educational issues which should be resolved by the professionals in the field under guidelines provided by the Board of Governors. Such guidelines appear to be more properly related to academic standards than to funding.

The study will recognize the need to consider the curriculum of the community colleges in terms that are broader, more descriptive and more accurate than "credit" and "noncredit." Reference will be made to broader classifications such as that in the Long-Term Finance Plan of the Board of Governors which refers to the mission of the community colleges as "comprehensive, including general, transfer, occupational, developmental and community education." When the curriculum is viewed from this perspective it is more readily apparent that transfer courses must be credit courses but credit courses need not be transfer courses. Issues related to academic standards may be resolved more readily. The quality of degrees may be protected without denying credit for educational efforts required to develop competencies to do baccalaureate preparatory work. (See illustration of a possible classification in the Appendix.)

Question #6: Should there be a relationship between credit/noncredit status and funding and, if so, what should it be?

This section explores the rationale or lack thereof to tie public funding to the academic credit status of courses. The argument here is that the two factors should be divorced. The criteria for determining the credit status of a course and its funding are (in concept) and can be (in practice) separately determined, measured, and applied.

Whether a course should be taught for collegiate credit or not-for-credit depends upon the topic or subject taught and, perhaps more importantly, the rigor and level of complexity with which it is taught and the needs

of the students enrolled. The question of how the course should be supported, i.e., whether by public subsidy or user fee, can depend on at least two basic criteria. The first criterion is the extent to which public (versus private) objectives are served by the course. The second criterion is the desire on the part of the public to make the course accessable to those individuals who because of economic, educational, or attitudinal reasons could not attend the course in the absence of a public subsidy.

To address these concerns, the discussion first reviews California funding practices during the past two decades, follows by examining current Board of Governor's funding policies, assesses these policies in light of popular notions about public support for community colleges, and finally reviews practices in other states.

Funding policies, the section argues, should be specifically defined in terms of public support concepts for the following categories which are differentially funded in the proposed Board policy: instruction, community service courses, and community service non-course activities. The concepts and criteria to be used here are only incidentally related to the academic-credit status of a course.

Aside from nominal "adult" and nonresident fees, community college instruction historically has been fully supported from public tax sources. Community services, where the major public support was from local taxes, derived less than 10 percent of its support from user fees.

Much of the complexity of prior finance policies derived from the state's effort to equalize differences in local property wealth and the policy that certain activities such as community services would be supported from local, rather than state, tax revenues.

Proposition 13 and subsequent legislation have made the distinction between the use of state versus local tax revenues irrelevant. The proportion of public tax support for community colleges now represented by local property taxes (about 20 percent of the total) is a purely mechanical, rather than policy, determination. The important policy distinction now is between user fees and total public support.

The Board's Long-Term Finance Plan proposes full public support of "instruction" and explicit, though partial, public support together with user fees for "community services." Here the distinction between instruction and community services is generic in character and based upon public support criteria, rather than the credit or degree-status of programs or the internal organization of colleges.

Question #7: How are the criteria and standards to be enforced?

Reference will be made to the Program and Course Approval Procedures described in response to Question #4.

A final response to this question should be considered only after earlier questions have been answered and the answers have been analyzed.

As a broader classification system evolves, monitor and review procedures may be more properly directed to consideration of classification of courses in terms broader than "credit" and "noncredit".

Plan approval may begin to replace specific course and program approval. That is the policy of the Board of Governors as adopted in the Long-Term Finance Plan and is one element of another item currently being considered by the Board. Such a shift contemplates a new procedure for enforcing standards.

It is possible that with separation of fiscal and educational issues and with a broader classification of educational programs, the current impasse over course approvals may be resolved within the existing authority of the Board of Governors.

Appendix

ILLUSTRATIVE CURRICULUM CLASSIFICATION

Note: A description or classification of community college curriculum for developing academic policy would be based upon different considerations than a classification developed for funding purposes. It appears possible, however, that once developed the two classifications could be merged. The following is an illustrative attempt to do so.

INSTRUCTIONAL FUNCTION	COURSE GRADING PRACTICE		WORK APPLIES TO DEGREE, CERTIFICATE, TRANSFER			PUBLIC/FEE FUNDING POLICY		
	Credit	NonCredit	Deg.	Trans.	Cert.	Full Subsidy	Partial Subsidy +Fees	No Subsidy Full Fee
"INSTRUCTION"								
Baccalaureate Education								
Occupational Education								
General Education								
Developmental Education								
Community Education								
"COMMUNITY SERVICES"								
A. Courses								
B. Activities								

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